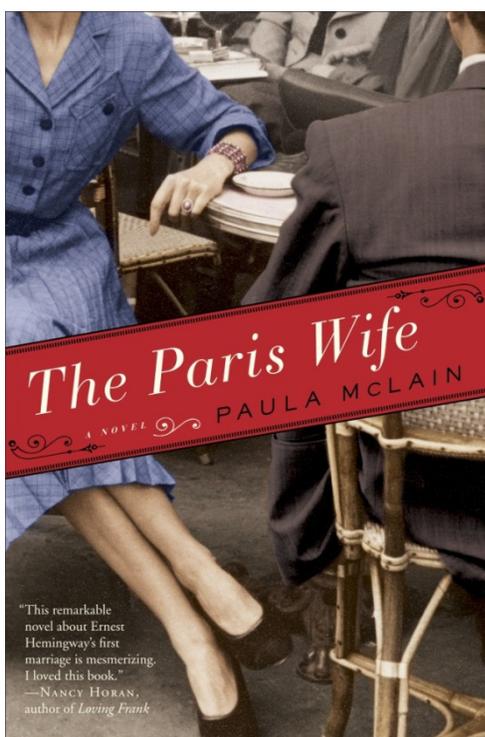


The Paris Wife

by Paula McLain

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

A deeply evocative story of ambition and betrayal, ***The Paris Wife*** captures a remarkable period of time—Paris in the twenties—and an extraordinary love affair between two unforgettable people: Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley.

In Chicago in 1920, Hadley Richardson is a quiet twenty-eight-year-old who has all but given up on love and happiness—until she meets Ernest Hemingway and finds herself captivated by his good looks, intensity, and passionate desire to write. Following a whirlwind courtship and wedding, the pair set sail for Paris, where they become the golden couple in a lively and volatile group of expatriates that includes Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald.

But the hard-drinking and fast-living café life does not celebrate traditional notions of family and monogamy. As Hadley struggles with jealousy and self-doubt and Ernest wrestles with his burgeoning writing career, they must confront a deception that could prove the undoing of one of the great romances in literary history.

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Book Details

The Paris Wife by Paula McLain. Ballantine Books, 2011, ISBN 9780345521309.

http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/features/paula_mclain/index.php

Also available as a talking book through the Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled:

<http://webopac.klas.com/ohbph>. Also available as an eBook and as an audiobook. Check with your local library!



About the Author

Paula McLain was born in Fresno, California in 1965. She worked a series of odd jobs to support herself – from pizza delivery girl to auto-plant worker – before realizing that writing was her true passion. McLain went on to earn an MFA in poetry from the University of Michigan and has been a resident of Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony in addition to receiving fellowships from The Ucross Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *Less of Her* (1999) and *Stumble, Gorgeous* (2005), as well as 2003's well-received memoir *Like Family* and her first novel, 2008's *A Ticket to Ride*. She currently teaches at John Carroll University as an English Lecturer and lives in Cleveland with her family.

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Author Resources:

Author Page on Random House website

http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/features/paula_mclain/author/

The Hemingway Project's Interview with Paula McLain

<http://www.thehemingwayproject.com/an-interview-with-paula-mclain-author-of-the-paris-wife/>

NPR's All Things Considered: Story on McLain and *The Paris Wife*

<http://www.npr.org/2011/03/01/134132944/the-paris-wife-dives-into-hemingways-first-big-love>

Paula McLain on Ernest Hemingway and *The Paris Wife* (video by Bond Street Books)

<http://youtu.be/mR6bfEvYLEo>

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Talk About It!

Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- In many ways, Hadley's girlhood in St. Louis was a difficult and repressive experience. How do her early years prepare her to meet and fall in love with Ernest? What does life with Ernest offer her that she hasn't encountered before? What are the risks?
- Hadley and Ernest don't get a lot of encouragement from their friends and family when they decided to marry. What seems to draw the two together? What are some of the strengths of their initial attraction and partnership? The challenges?
- The Ernest Hemingway we meet in ***The Paris Wife***—through Hadley's eyes—is in many ways different from the ways we imagine him when faced with the largeness of his later persona. What do you see as his character strengths? Can you see what Hadley saw in him?
- The Hemingways spontaneously opt for Paris over Rome when they get key advice from Sherwood Anderson. What was life like for them when they first arrived? How did Hadley's initial feelings about Paris differ from Ernest's and why?
- Throughout ***The Paris Wife***, Hadley refers to herself as "Victorian" as opposed to "modern." What are some of the ways she doesn't feel like she fits into life in bohemian Paris? How does this impact her relationship with Ernest? Her self-esteem? What are some of the ways Hadley's "old-fashioned" quality can be seen as a strength and not a weakness?
- Hadley and Ernest's marriage survived for many years in Jazz-Age Paris, an environment that had very little patience for monogamy and other traditional values. What in their relationship seems to sustain them? How does their marriage differ from those around them? Pound's and Shakespeare's? Scott and Zelda's?
- Most of ***The Paris Wife*** is written in Hadley's voice, but a few select passages come to us from Ernest's point of view. What impact does getting Ernest's perspective have on our understanding of their marriage? How does it affect your ability to understand him and his motivations in general?
- What was the role of literary spouses in 1920's Paris? How is Hadley challenged and restricted by her gender? Would those restrictions have changed if she had been an artist and not merely a "wife"?
- At one point, Ezra Pound warns Hadley that it would be a dire mistake to let parenthood change Ernest. Is there a nugget of truth behind his concern? What are some of the ways Ernest is changed by Bumby's birth? What about Hadley? What does motherhood bring to her life, for better or worse?
- One of the most wrenching scenes in the book is when Hadley loses a valise containing all of Ernest's work to date. What kind of turning point does this mark for the Hemingway's marriage? Do you think Ernest ever forgives her?
- When the couple moves to Toronto to have Bumby, Ernest tries his best to stick it out with a regular "nine-to-five" reporter's job, and yet he ultimately finds this impossible. Why is life in Toronto so difficult for Ernest? Why does Hadley agree to go back to Paris earlier than they planned, even though she doesn't know how they'll make it financially? How does she benefit from supporting his decision to make a go at writing only fiction?



<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>

- Hadley and Ernest had similar upbringings in many ways. What are the parallels, and how do these affect the choices Hadley makes as a wife and mother?
- In ***The Paris Wife***, when Ernest receives his contract for ***In Our Time***, Hadley says, “He would never again be unknown. We would never again be this happy.” How did fame affect Ernest and his relationship with Hadley?
- ***The Sun Also Rises*** is drawn from the Hemingways' real-life experiences with bullfighting in Spain. Ernest and his friends are clearly present in the book, but Hadley is not. Why? In what ways do you think Hadley is instrumental to the book regardless, and to Ernest's career in general?
- How does the time and place—Paris in the 20's—affect Ernest and Hadley's marriage? What impact does the war, for instance, have on the choices and behavior of the expatriate artists surrounding the Hemingways? Do you see Ernest changing in response to the world around him? How, and how does Hadley feel about those changes?
- What was the nature of the relationship between Hadley and Pauline Pfeiffer? Were they legitimately friends? How do you see Pauline taking advantage of her intimate position in the Hemingway's life? Do you think Hadley is naïve for not suspecting Pauline of having designs on Ernest earlier? Why or why not?
- It seems as if Ernest tries to make his marriage work even after Pauline arrives on the scene. What would Hadley it have cost Hadley to stick it out with Ernest no matter what? Is there a way she could have fought harder for her marriage?
- In many ways, Hadley is a very different person at the end of the novel than the girl who encounters Ernest by chance at a party. How do you understand her trajectory and transformation? Are there any ways she essentially doesn't change?
- When Hemingway's biographer Carlos Baker interviewed Hadley Richardson near the end of her life, he expected her to be bitter, and yet she persisted in describing Ernest as a “prince.” How can she have continued to love and admire him after the way he hurt her?
- Ernest Hemingway spent the last months of his life tenderly reliving his first marriage in the pages his memoir, ***A Moveable Feast***. In fact, it was the last thing he wrote before his death. Do you think he realized what he'd truly lost with Hadley?

Discussion questions courtesy of Random House

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Explore More!

Additional ideas and resources to use with **The Paris Wife**.

Milestones in the Life of Ernest Hemingway

http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/features/paula_mclain/timeline/

An interactive timeline that sheds light into the significant moments in Hemingway's life, from his birth and the start of his career to his relationships and tragic death.

The Hemingway Project

<http://www.thehemingwayproject.com/>

This blog acts as "a bridge between [Hemingway] academics and aficionados" and explores his life and works in addition to his travels, companions, and the eras in which he lived.

The Hemingway Review

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hem/>

This bi-annual journal by The Hemingway Society and The University of Idaho Press offers feature-length scholarly articles on the work and life of Ernest Hemingway in addition to book reviews, bibliographies, notes, and library information.

Check it Out!

Read Gioia Dilibert's book **Paris Without End: The True Story of Hemingway's First Wife** (2011). In this compelling and insightful account of young Ernest Hemingway and his first wife Hadley Richardson's life together in 1920s Paris, Gioia Diliberto offers an illuminating glimpse into the early years of this captivating and enigmatic writer and the woman who was his muse. Look for a copy of **Paris Without End** at your local library:

<http://www.oplin.org/content/find-a-library>.

The Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park

<http://www.ehfop.org/>

Explore the many facets of Hemingway's life and career at the Hemingway Museum's website, from photos and current news to a video tour of the house in which Hemingway's life began and links to various Hemingway resources.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

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